



State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Administrative Policies and Procedures: 11.4

Subject: Functional Assessment Process

Supersedes: None

Local Policy: No

Local Procedures: No

Training Required: No

Applicable Practice Model Standard(s): Yes

Approved by:

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Application

To All Department of Children's Services Employees

Authority: TCA 37-5-106

Policy

The Department of Children's Services will use the Functional Assessment process to engage children and families in a professional helping relationship to identify strengths and underlying needs and to build the child and family team. Any DCS case manager who has initial contact with a family will initiate the Functional Assessment process. The Functional Assessment will be updated on an ongoing basis according to program requirements at all relevant decision-making points, and throughout the life of the case as changes occur and progress is made.

Procedures

A. Assessment Process

1. Gathering Information

a) Information can be obtained through the use of:

- ◆ Interviews,
- ◆ Observations,
- ◆ Records checks,
- ◆ Collateral reports,

- ◆ Evaluations,
 - ◆ Pictorial tools,
 - ◆ DCS assessment tools, and
 - ◆ Other appropriate evidence-based tools.
- b) DCS staff shall interact with families and children using culturally competent, interpersonal skills demonstrating genuineness, empathy, and respect for the family and individuals in accordance with DCS policy [31.7, Engaging Families](#).
- c) When interviewing members of the child and family team, it is important for the case manager to “hear the family story” by engaging the family. Interviews with family members should be driven by the information that the person has to offer and should not be driven by questions on a questionnaire. Interviews will seek underlying issues to surface behaviors or problems.

2. Analyzing Information

- a) Information will be analyzed by identifying signs of safety (strengths) and signs of risk (needs and concerns).
- b) Case managers should ask the family to identify the presence of underlying strengths and needs by utilizing solution-focused questions. Allowing the family to attach new/different meaning to experiences or events, will ultimately assist the family in recognizing a need for change. During case conferences, supervisors should assist case managers with further analysis of information.

3. Drawing Conclusions and Making Decisions

- a) Conclusions and decisions about family strengths, needs, and service delivery are made in conjunction with the child and family team and within the child and family team meeting in accordance with DCS policy [31.7, Engaging Families](#).
- b) Families who have been working with their case manager through the functional assessment process of identifying underlying issues, attaching new meaning in relation to strengths and needs, and recognizing a need for change are ready to actively participate in the child and family team meeting process to determine solutions

toward creating that change.

B. Use of the Functional Assessment Field Guide

1. The *Functional Assessment Field Guide* is a preparation tool that case managers can use to identify questions for interviewing. However, interviews should not be exclusive to questions from the Field Guide. In order to explore family functioning, case managers should ask questions relevant to the conversation with the family member and relevant to the information being shared to explore family functioning.
2. Interviews with family members will be conducted face-to-face when possible. Phone interviews can be used when face-to-face interviews are not possible.

C. Initiating the Functional Assessment

The DCS case manager who has first contact with the family will initiate the Functional Assessment process with a face-to-face interview.

D. Maintaining and updating the on-going Functional Assessment

Case managers are responsible for updating the Functional Assessment so that at any point in time the Functional Assessment document will give a clear representation of the family's current functioning. Documentation into the Functional Assessment Web Application must occur within five (5) business days of gathering information. The Functional Assessment will be updated as outlined below:

1. Anytime new assessment information is obtained or prior to a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM); or
2. Minimally, on a quarterly basis; or
3. Prior to case closure.

E. Functional Assessment the family's re-involvement with DCS

When a family re-enters for the services of DCS after a previous case of any kind has been closed, the already existing Functional Assessment will be resumed. At no time should a new Functional Assessment document be initiated. The family should be thoroughly re-interviewed to verify old information and ascertain new information. New information regarding family strengths and needs are added to the functional assessment to continue the comprehensive case assessment.

F. CPS and Functional Assessment

CPS case managers and employees will document on the Functional Assessment if the case is referred for on-going services or becomes a DCS custody case. Functional Assessment documentation for families will be completed and documented within five (5) business days of case transfer to Family Support Services or custodial case manager.

G. Custody cases

1. If a family has never had prior involvement with DCS and the child enters custody through the courts or voluntary placement, or does not have a previously started Functional Assessment, the Foster Care or Juvenile Justice Home County Case Manager (HCCM) will initiate the Functional Assessment.
2. If the case has had prior Functional Assessment documentation, the case manager will use previously gathered assessment information as a starting point for continuing the on-going Functional Assessment process.
3. Functional Assessment documentation for families with children in DCS custody will be thoroughly documented by the Child and Family Team prior to the 15-day Permanency Plan Child and Family Team Meeting.

H. Probation cases

Juvenile Justice employees will initiate the Functional Assessment on children/youth who first come to the attention of DCS on probation. Functional Assessment information for children on probation will be thoroughly documented within twenty (20) working days for preparation in developing the Individual Program Plan (IPP) with the child and family.

I. Use of pictorial tools

1. Pictorial tools include:
 - a) Genogram;
 - b) Timeline;
 - c) Family map, and
 - d) Ecomap
2. Pictorial Tools assist the case manager in conducting a family-centered, strengths-based, culturally-inclusive assessment. These tools offer visual representations of how families view themselves and the outside world, and help useful families see their strengths and needs.
3. All case managers will use at least one pictorial tool during

the assessment process. A copy of the pictorial tool should be given to the family, maintained in the case file, and documented in the Functional Assessment.

J. Use of the Functional Assessment as a pre-disposition report

The case manager assigned to complete a pre-disposition or non-custodial report ordered by the Court will interview all relevant persons to the case and gather all collateral information (school records, evaluations, etc.). The case manager will then initiate or update the Functional Assessment document as outlined in this policy.

K. Supervisor review

1. Supervisors will review the Functional Assessment:
 - a) Prior to Child and Family Team Meetings,
 - b) As part of a case audit, and/or
 - c) As often as needed according to case needs.
2. The supervisor completing the review will enter:
 - a) Date,
 - b) Name, and
 - c) Narrative
3. The narrative will specifically address the strengths in documentation as well as the areas that the case manager still needs to address.

L. Field implementation of the functional assessment process

Case Managers will begin using the Functional Assessment Process and discontinue use of the Social History upon completion of Certification Training as follows:

1. Case managers will implement the Functional Assessment process on all new custodial, probation, and CPS cases referred for on going services or entering custody
2. Case managers will transition previously existing custodial cases to the Functional Assessment Process prior to the next Child and Family Team Meeting scheduled for that case.

Forms

None

Collateral Documents

Documentation of the Family Functional Assessment Process

Family Functional Assessment Field Guide

Functional Assessment Web Application

Standards

DCS Practice Model Standard - 2-105B

DCS Practice Model Standard - 2-109B

DCS Practice Model Standard - 2-110B

DCS Practice Model Standard – 5-201

DCS Practice Model Standard – 5-204

DCS Practice Model Standard – 6-400

DCS Practice Model Standard – 6-507B

DCS Practice Model Standard - 6-508B

DCS Practice Model Standard – 6-513C

DCS Practice Model Standard – 8-101

DCS Practice Model Standard – 8-206B

DCS Practice Model Standard – 10-101

DCS Practice Model Standard – 11-101

DCS Practice Model Standard - 11-103

DCS Practice Model Standard - 11-302A

DCS Practice Model Standard – 11-307A

DCS Practice Model Standard – 11-310B

DCS Practice Model Standard – 11-315B

Glossary

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Assessment:</i>	The on-going process of organizing and analyzing the information gathered.
<i>Ecomap:</i>	A map that provides a visual image of family members who reside in the household and the formal and informal resources in the community available to them.

- Family Map:** A map that provides a visual image of the aspects of a family system. The family will identify who resides in the household and their current system dynamics. A) Which family members hold the most and least power; b) How parent-child boundaries are acted out in the family; and c) How the various members of that family system interact and relate to one another.
- Functional:** Refers to the things that are and are not working for the child and family.
- Genogram:** A visual representation of generations within a family, charted vertically through time. A series of symbols, i.e., squares, circles or triangles used to depict male and female family members in charting the structure of a family. Triangles are used when the sex of a member is not known. The family will identify quality of relationships between family members. This tool assists the child and family team in identifying resources within the family.
- Timeline:** The family will identify significant events, key dates and provide a brief description of the event, including who was present. Family members are asked to include the most significant events, especially those that are highs and lows. Reflecting on the timeline can help the family see how they have responded to those events. It will help them examine the variety of ways they have been influenced by events that have been both positive and negative in their lives. This tool can help clarify strengths and help validate the skills that were used to respond to some of the most difficult issues in the family's life.